



The Challenges And Adaptability Of English Language Teachers Towards Online Teaching During Covid-19

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Abstract: The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the closure of educational institutions and a shift from physical classrooms to virtual classrooms. This study examines the challenges faced by English language teachers in adapting to virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the preparedness of teachers and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and utilizes open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and documentation as data collection instruments. The paper reveals the challenges experienced by English language teachers, like sudden shift to online teaching, lack of adequate technological infrastructure, digital literacy, engagement and interaction, assessment and feedback, emotional and psychological impact, and hybrid teaching models. Despite these challenges, teachers have implemented various strategies such as using interactive online tools, creating engaging activities, maintaining regular communication with students, and providing additional support. The study emphasizes the importance of teacher adaptability and positive mindset in effectively teaching English in virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords-Challenges, adaptability, English Language Teachers, Online, COVID-19

I. INTRODUCTION

The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions worldwide to transition rapidly from face-to-face interactions to virtual platforms (Ketki Satpute). This unprecedented shift brought about a myriad of challenges for educators, particularly those teaching English as a second language. English language teachers were tasked with not only transferring their curricula to online formats but also ensuring that their teaching methods remained effective in engaging students and facilitating learning. They faced technological barriers, such as unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to necessary devices, which hindered smooth interactions and the overall teaching process. Additionally, many educators struggled with digital literacy, as they were unprepared for the technical demands of online teaching, requiring them to quickly learn and effectively use various digital platforms and tools. Maintaining student engagement and interaction was another significant challenge; traditional methods like group discussions and hands-on activities had to be creatively adapted for online environments to keep students interested and participative (Kamal et al.). The adaptation of assessment methods to online formats also posed difficulties, necessitating

the development of new strategies to evaluate student performance fairly and effectively. Moreover, the emotional and psychological impact of the pandemic on teachers, exacerbated by the blurring of personal and professional boundaries and isolation from colleagues and students, led to increased stress and burnout. Despite these challenges, many English language teachers demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience, taking advantage of professional development opportunities to improve their digital literacy and adopting innovative teaching methods to maintain engagement (Sahito et al.). They built peer support networks for sharing resources and strategies, developed flexible assessment approaches, and provided emotional support to students to create a positive and inclusive virtual learning environment. These efforts underscore the dedication of educators to ensure continuous and effective education amidst the complexities of virtual classrooms during the pandemic.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify the challenges faced by English language teachers in virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. To explore the preparedness of English language teachers in adapting to virtual classrooms.
- iii. To investigate the strategies employed by English language teachers to overcome the challenges of virtual instruction.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous research has highlighted the influence of social media on EFL learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies have also discussed trends in virtual classrooms and the challenges associated with online teaching (Ketki Satpute). Furthermore, the literature addresses the challenges faced by teachers in remote areas towards online teaching during the pandemic (Virgin et al.). The impact of distance learning on English language teaching has also been explored (Kamal et al.).

IV. METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the challenges and adaptability of English language teachers towards online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research design includes a review of existing literature, surveys, blog posts, media and opinions of English language teachers who transitioned to virtual teaching. The literature review provides a theoretical framework and context for understanding the broad challenges faced by educators during this period. And surveys, blog posts, media and opinions of English language teachers give firsthand accounts and detailed insights into the specific difficulties and adaptive strategies employed by these teachers.

V. ANALYSIS

1. COVID-19

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which emerged in late 2019. It primarily spreads through respiratory droplets and has led to a global pandemic, significantly impacting public health, economies, and daily life. Symptoms can range from mild respiratory issues to severe illness and even death.

2. Lockdown

Lockdown refers to a set of restrictions imposed by governments to contain the spread of COVID-19. These measures typically include the closure of schools, businesses, and public spaces, as well as limits on movement and gatherings. The aim is to reduce human interaction to prevent the virus's transmission.

3. Online Teaching

Online teaching is the process of educating students via the internet using digital platforms and tools. It became essential during the COVID-19 pandemic as schools and universities had to shift from traditional classroom settings to remote learning environments to continue education while adhering to lockdown restrictions.

4. English Teaching in Lockdown

English teaching in lockdown refers to the specific challenges and adaptations faced by English language educators during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This includes transitioning to online teaching methods, using digital tools to maintain student engagement, and addressing the varied technological and emotional needs of students learning from home. The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced educational institutions worldwide to transition rapidly from face-to-face interactions to virtual platforms. This unprecedented shift brought about a myriad of challenges for educators, particularly those teaching English as a second language. English language teachers were tasked with not only transferring their curricula to online formats but also ensuring that their teaching methods remained effective in engaging students and facilitating learning.

5. Challenges Faced by English Language Teachers towards Online Teaching during COVID-19.

English language teachers faced various challenges in adapting to virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges included inadequate infrastructure, difficulties in capturing students' attention, financial constraints, students' readiness for online learning, limited parental support, technical issues, managing increased workload, and finding effective assessment methods (Altam). Some of the challenges that the English teachers faced are as follows;

5. i. *The Sudden Shift to Online Teaching*: The abrupt transition to online teaching was met with a mix of anxiety and curiosity among English language teachers. The immediate requirement to continue education without interruption led to a frantic search for suitable online platforms and tools. Many educators were initially overwhelmed by the rapid shift, as they had little to no prior experience with virtual teaching environments. The pressure to quickly master new technologies and teaching methods was immense, as teachers sought to ensure their students could continue learning effectively despite the physical separation (The Tribune).
5. ii. *Lack of Adequate Technological Infrastructure*: One of the primary challenges faced by English language teachers was the lack of adequate technological infrastructure. Many teachers including English teachers and their students encountered issues related to unreliable internet connectivity, which hindered their ability to participate in live classes and access online resources seamlessly. Limited access to necessary devices such as computers, tablets, and even smartphones compounded the problem. In regions with poor internet infrastructure, teachers struggled to maintain consistent communication with their students, often resorting to asynchronous methods that could not fully replicate the interactive nature of traditional classrooms (Satpute).
5. iii. *Digital Literacy*: A significant number of English language teachers were unprepared for the technical demands of virtual teaching. The abrupt transition required them to quickly familiarize themselves with various digital platforms and tools, adding an extra layer of stress and complexity to their roles. Many teachers had to self-teach or rely on peer support to master the functionalities of video conferencing software, learning management systems, and digital collaboration tools. This lack of preparedness highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive professional development programs focused on digital literacy and online pedagogy (Sahito et al.).
5. iv. *Engagement and Interaction*: Ensuring active participation and maintaining student engagement in a virtual classroom proved to be a formidable challenge. Traditional methods of interaction, such as group discussions, pair work, and hands-on activities, had to be adapted for online formats. English language teachers had to employ creative and innovative approaches to foster a sense of community and encourage student interaction. Techniques such as breakout rooms, interactive polls, and multimedia presentations became essential tools in the virtual classroom. However, the lack of physical presence made it difficult to gauge student reactions and provide immediate support, often leading to decreased engagement and participation.

5. v. *Assessment and Feedback*: Adapting assessment methods to the online environment was another significant hurdle. English language teachers had to develop new strategies for evaluating student performance and providing timely feedback in a manner that was both fair and effective. Traditional assessments such as in-class tests and oral presentations had to be rethought to accommodate the constraints of virtual learning. Teachers experimented with various forms of online assessments, including digital quizzes, written assignments submitted through learning management systems, and virtual presentations. Ensuring academic integrity and preventing cheating became additional concerns that required innovative solutions.
5. vi. *Emotional and Psychological Impact*: The sudden shift to online teaching also had profound emotional and psychological impacts on teachers. The blurring of boundaries between personal and professional spaces, coupled with the isolation from colleagues and students, led to increased levels of stress and burnout. English language teachers, who often rely on close personal interaction to create a supportive learning environment, found themselves grappling with feelings of disconnection and fatigue. The lack of immediate feedback and the constant pressure to adapt to new technologies added to their stress. Schools and institutions had to recognize these challenges and provide emotional and psychological support to help teachers navigate this new landscape.

These challenges impacted the effectiveness of language instruction and required teachers to develop innovative strategies.

6. Adaptability and Strategies by English Language Teachers towards Online Teaching during COVID-19.

Despite these challenges, English teachers along with many other educators demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. This period of rapid adaptation highlighted the critical need for ongoing support and training in digital literacy and online pedagogy to better prepare teachers for future disruptions in traditional educational models. They employed various strategies to enhance their online teaching effectiveness.

6. i. *Professional Development*: Many English language educators took advantage of professional development opportunities to improve their digital literacy and learn best practices for online teaching. Workshops, webinars, and online courses became invaluable resources. For instance, platforms like SWAYAM, edX, Coursera, Udemy and NPTEL, UGC HRDCs offered various professional learning opportunities, from live webinars to self-paced courses, helping teachers navigate the digital landscape effectively. Additionally, Institutions provided free online professional development focused on research-based classroom strategies, further supporting educators during this transition.
6. ii. *Innovative Teaching Methods*: To maintain student engagement, English language teachers incorporated multimedia resources, interactive activities, and collaborative tools into their online classrooms. Platforms such as Webex, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and other social media became essential components of their teaching toolkit. These tools enabled teachers to create dynamic lessons that included video clips, interactive quizzes, PPTs and group activities. For example, breakout rooms in Zoom allowed for small group discussions, while tools like Padlet facilitated collaborative work.
6. iii. *Use of Interactive Tools*: English teachers incorporated interactive elements like quizzes and polls to keep students engaged. Utilizing platforms such as Kahoot and Google Forms, educators were able to create dynamic and engaging lessons. These tools allowed for real-time interaction, making lessons more interactive and enjoyable for students. Interactive quizzes and polls also provided immediate feedback, helping both students and teachers gauge understanding and retention of the material.

6. iv. *Peer Support Networks*: Building and maintaining peer support networks helped teachers, particularly English teachers share resources, strategies, and provide mutual support during this challenging time. These networks facilitated the exchange of ideas and fostered a sense of community among educators. Through forums, social media groups, and professional organizations, teachers could connect, share their experiences, and offer advice. This collaborative spirit was crucial in overcoming the isolation caused by remote teaching.
6. v. *Flexible Assessment Approaches*: To address the difficulties in traditional assessment methods, English teachers adopted more flexible approaches, such as open-book exams, project-based assessments, and online presentations. These methods allowed for a more comprehensive evaluation of student learning. English teachers also utilized digital tools to administer and grade assessments, ensuring fairness and efficiency. For example, Google Forms enabled the creation of quizzes that provided instant feedback, while project-based assessments encouraged students to demonstrate their understanding through creative means.
6. vi. *Regular Feedback*: Providing regular feedback helped in maintaining student interest and understanding. English teachers used various methods, such as formal assessments, informal check-ins, and interactive discussions, to ensure students were on track. Regular feedback sessions helped in identifying learning gaps early and allowed for timely intervention. This approach not only kept students motivated but also helped in building a continuous learning loop where students could improve based on constructive criticism (Pearson Blog).
6. vii. *Flexible Scheduling*: Adapting to flexible schedules accommodates different time zones and home environments of students. This flexibility was crucial, especially for international students or those with varying home responsibilities. Teachers implemented flexible work hours and asynchronous learning options to cater to the diverse needs of their students. Recorded lectures, flexible assignment deadlines, and personalized learning schedules ensured that all students could participate fully regardless of their circumstances.
6. viii. *Emotional Support for Students*: Recognizing the emotional toll of the pandemic on students, all teachers, including English language teachers made concerted efforts to provide emotional support and create a positive and inclusive virtual learning environment. This included regular check-ins, encouraging open communication, and being empathetic to students' challenges. English teachers used tools like Google Meet and Microsoft Teams to hold one-on-one sessions with students, offering a space to discuss both academic and personal concerns. Creating a supportive atmosphere was vital in helping students navigate the uncertainties of the pandemic.
6. ix. *Hybrid Teaching Models*: These strategies can also enhance hybrid models of teaching, combining traditional and online methods. Hybrid learning involves instructing both in-person and remote students simultaneously, creating a more inclusive and flexible learning environment. By leveraging interactive tools, maintaining regular feedback loops, and adapting to flexible schedules, hybrid teaching can provide a seamless and cohesive learning experience for all students, regardless of their location (Yang). Hybrid teaching also benefits from the flexibility and independence offered by remote learning while retaining the advantages of face-to-face interaction. This model can be particularly useful in higher education, professional development.

In conclusion, the adaptability of English language teachers to the challenges of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic highlights their dedication to ensuring continuous and effective education. By overcoming technological barriers, enhancing their digital literacy, and employing innovative teaching strategies, these educators have shown resilience and resourcefulness in navigating the complexities of virtual classrooms.

VI. DISCUSSION

Preparedness and Strategies

The preparedness of English language teachers played a crucial role in their adaptability to virtual classrooms. Teachers who had prior experience with online teaching or received training in online pedagogy exhibited higher levels of preparedness and were more effective in navigating the challenges of virtual instruction. On the other hand, teachers who lacked prior experience or training faced greater difficulties in adapting to the virtual environment. English language teachers employed a range of strategies to overcome the challenges posed by virtual instruction. These strategies included the use of interactive online tools, creating engaging and interactive activities, maintaining regular communication with students through various digital platforms, providing additional support and resources, and adapting assessment methods to suit the online context. Teachers also emphasized the importance of creating a positive and inclusive online learning environment to enhance student engagement and motivation.

The findings of this study align with previous research on the challenges and adaptability of teachers in virtual classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Latif). The challenges identified in this study are consistent with the broader literature, highlighting the need for adequate infrastructure, student engagement, and teacher preparedness in online language instruction. The strategies employed by English language teachers reflect the innovative approaches necessary to overcome these challenges and ensure effective language learning in the virtual setting.

The study emphasizes the importance of professional development and training programs for English language teachers to enhance their preparedness for virtual classrooms. Such programs can equip teachers with the necessary pedagogical skills, technological competence, and strategies to address the specific challenges of online instruction. Additionally, the study highlights the significance of ongoing support and collaboration among teachers to share best practices and resources.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated a shift to virtual classrooms, presenting numerous challenges for English language teachers. However, through their adaptability, preparedness, and implementation of effective strategies, teachers can successfully navigate these challenges and ensure meaningful language learning experiences for their students. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on virtual language instruction during the pandemic and underscore the importance of supporting teachers in their transition to online teaching.

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